

# SON OF HEAVEN NOW, WHAT HONOR NEXT FOR YUAN SHI KAI?



## Chinese President's Assumption of Spiritual as Well as Temporal Prerogatives of Emperor Leads Many to Declare Him Tyrant and Usurper.

**T**HE servant of the people now becomes the "Son of Heaven!"

The President of the Republic, not entirely satisfied with the democratic honors of his earthly position, now seeks a foothold in Heaven, where he hopes to pluck celestial honors and twine them around his unsatisfied brow.

In other words Yuan Shi-kai, President of the Republic of China, by grace of his strong right arm and an unflinching ruthlessness, has now become the head of the Chinese state religion of Confucianism.

In the capital city of Peking on December 23 President Yuan Shi-kai appeared before the altar of Heaven in the Chinese city at sunrise and there revived the worship of Heaven at the winter solstice. It was the first time this worship had been observed since the fall of the Manchu dynasty in 1911.

In this the president of the republic took upon himself a function and a rite which in the past always has been reserved to the Emperor of China in his capacity as "Son of Heaven." The president worshipped at the famous circular altar, the most important of all the Chinese religious structures, which has a noble history extending far back into the centuries. It is located in a park, three miles from the palaces of the emperors, and is surrounded by sacred buildings. Formerly the altar was regarded by China as the center of the universe.

Yuan had the permission of the Chinese parliament to conduct this worship. He was given the right to worship both Heaven and Confucius in an official capacity. To all practical purposes a state religion has now been founded in China. Hereafter the president of the republic will conduct this worship annually. And as for Yuan, it brings him one step nearer to permanent occupancy of the throne of China.

While there was no one to predict that the young Yuan Shi-kai would ever become a "Son of Heaven" there were plenty who knew the gentleman in his youth who were willing to wager anything they possessed that he would make his mark in the world. The Manchus, the Chinese and the foreigners in China all labeled him "a coming man."

He was born in 1859, the son of a district governor. His school teachers picked him out for a bad egg, for to save his life he could not master the old classics as the good little boys in the class could—the good little boys who have not been heard of since. Yuan Shi-kai aspired to an official position, but he couldn't reach it because of the strained relations existing between him and the classics. In China the very first thing to be accomplished if you wish to enter official life is to master the classics.

So Yuan Shi-kai, the failure, gave up his aspirations and went into Korea as a secretary to the army. His military and diplomatic ability attracted everybody's attention. Li Hung Chang appointed him to a most important position at Seoul when Yuan was only twenty-six years old. After the war with Japan he reorganized the Chinese army, and it is generally asserted that a few years later he helped the Empress Dowager wrest the throne from the Emperor Kuang Hsu.

For his help Yuan was made governor of a province.

When the Boxer rebellion came along he was invited to join the movement. He did not dare refuse. He agreed to ally himself with the cause if the leaders would prove to him their contention that foreign bullets could not harm them. He told them that he had one of the foreign guns in his own house and that if the leaders would meet him in his garden the next day he would stand them up against the wall and

try the "foreign devils' magic" on them. So sublime was the faith of one leader that he agreed to undergo the test and fell dead at the first rifle bullet which pierced his heart. Yuan later gave considerable assistance to foreigners during this trouble.

When the Empress Dowager died and the child Emperor, Hsun Tung, came to the throne, Yuan, because he was popular with the army, was dismissed in disgrace, although nominally on a pretext of "curing a sore leg." When the anti-Manchu rebellion broke out the Manchu regency in despair urged Yuan to return. He replied that his "leg was not yet well," but when given authority as supreme commander of the forces of the north, he accepted.

When the republic was founded in 1912, he had attained such power that he compelled the retirement of the provisional president and himself assumed the office of president. He has ruled with great firmness, authority and ability, according to some of the foreign residents of China, but with a tyranny greater than that of any emperor in recent years. If the word of many Chinese is to be taken for truth, His assumption of the function and rite which in the past



YUAN SHI-KAI

as the god of gods, it is commonly believed that the Chinese worship a number of deities. It is true that they have a number of lesser gods, but these lesser gods are to be compared to the saints and archangels of Greek and Roman Catholicism.

There are as many Chinese divinities as there are Christian saints, but certain gods are favorites and their temples are found in every village. One of the gods whom Yuan Shi-kai must worship is the lord of war, Kwan Ti. He is a national hero of China who died in 219 A. D. In his early years he was a seller of bean curds. Later on he applied himself to study until during the war of the Three Kingdoms he took up arms in defense of the imperial house of Han against the rebels of the yellow turban. Partly as a result of his efforts, the loyalist party won. He was not only a brave general, but a protector of the honor of women.

One interesting incident in his life made him the pattern of chivalrous behavior. An ambitious general of the imbecile Emperor Hien-Ti, wished to usurp the imperial power and deprive the rightful heir of the throne. When he recognized the sterling qualities of Kwan Ti, he tried to sow enmity between him and the heir and with this end in view imprisoned two wives of the heir, the ladies Kan and Mei, and caused Kwan Ti to be shut up with them at night in the same apartment.

But the faithful warrior preserved his honor and the reputation of the ladies by keeping guard in an ante-chamber the livelong night with a lighted lantern. In allusion to the untarnished name of the hero the Chinese to this day say "Kwan Yun's lighted candle lasts until morning." But Kwan Yun was later beheaded by the ambitious general and received his reward by being deified.

A Kwan Ti temple exists in every village and people consult it in many affairs of their lives. In Kwan Ti temples is found a method of divination which is highly esteemed by the illiterate classes. A great number of miracles are written on



wooden slips which are attached to the divining board and marked with a special symbol for each. The same symbols are written on sticks and locked up in a box with a hole in one corner. The box is shaken until one stick comes out and the oracle thus determined by the symbol of the stick is read off from the divining board.

The Temple of Heaven at which President Yuan Shi-kai worshipped, is surrounded by two walls. He and his train passed through two gates before approaching the shrine. In the court of the temple is an arched bridge. Both the pond and the bridge possess an ancient meaning, but the symbolism is not quite clear. It is possible that the bridge represents the same thing as the drum bridge in the Shinto temples of Japan, which represents the rainbow and is called the floating bridge over which Izanagi and Izanami passed at the time of the creation.

The President of China will now assume the duty which formerly belonged to the emperors of China of decreeing spring and fall festivals in honor of the "Queen of Heaven." These two festivals are official holidays and they are celebrated with great rejoicing. They are announced by large placards bearing official proclamations with the inscription "Heavenly Queen and Holy Mother" on the right, and on the left in small characters on top "By order" and in large characters "Spring and Autumn Festivals."

had always been reserved to the Emperor of China in his capacity of "Son of Heaven," is considered by some Chinese to be only another step toward his ambition to assume the title and position of Emperor of China.

The official religion of China of which President Yuan Shi-kai is now the acknowledged head, is Confucianism. Confucianism is not so much a religion as it is a system for proper living. Confucius not only left to the Chinese their traditional institutions of the worship of Heaven and of ancestors but even insisted on them.

He impressed his followers with the necessity of propriety, that is, rules of behavior and in consequence the Chinese are the most punctilious people in the world in the observance of politeness and good manners.

Confucius was not satisfied with goodness nor with purity of heart. He demanded in addition a punctilious observance of decorum, the behavior of a gentleman or gentlewoman, according to the established laws of propriety.

This religion is in a state similar to the Christianity which is to be found in Greek and Roman Catholic countries. In spite of the fact that Shang Ti, the lord on high, is recognised